Setting the Stage

The defiant cyclist stepped to the podium at the World Cancer Congress in Montreal and told the 2,000 dignitaries gathered before him, “My name is Lance Armstrong. I am a cancer survivor. I’m a father of five. And yes, I won the Tour de France seven times.” (Associated Press, August 29, 2012) This marked the first public appearance by Armstrong since he bowed out of his battle with the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA). The USADA had accused the elite cyclist of using performance-enhancing drugs throughout his storied career. Once Armstrong made the decision to give up the fight with the USADA, the agency promptly stripped him of all his awards and titles, including his seven Tour de France triumphs.

Hero (?)

The hero side of the Lance Armstrong story reads like a Hollywood script. A truly gifted athlete, Armstrong rose through the ranks of the United States cycling community to grab the US amateur title in 1991. In 1993, he won a stage of the Tour de France along with the World Road Championship. He continued to be a force in cycling until the fall of 1996 when he began to feel unusually weak. Along with the weakness came a soreness in one of his testicles — which is not unusual for saddle-bound cyclists who are on a bike six hours a day. But when he started to spit up blood, Armstrong knew he needed to get to a doctor. Almost immediately he was diagnosed with testicular cancer and shortly thereafter he had the cancerous testicle removed. Unfortunately the cancer had spread to his lungs, abdomen, and brain. What followed was intense chemotherapy and brain surgery. When he was diagnosed, doctors gave him a less than 50 per cent chance of survival. He was only 25 years old at the time. Despite the odds, and thanks to a combination of will power and extensive medical intervention, Armstrong beat the cancer and stayed alive.

No one could imagine what would come next. In spite of the debilitating toll that the cancer, and subsequent cancer treatment, took on his body, Armstrong mounted a cycling comeback. He trained relentlessly and, through an incredible display of determination, got his physical conditioning to a point that no doctors thought he could reach. By 1998, he was in competitive race shape again and in 1999 he won his first Tour de France (the first of seven straight), arguably one of the greatest cycling feats ever. In the same period, Armstrong also won an Olympic bronze medal and received millions of dollars in commercial endorsements.

Meanwhile back home in Texas, Armstrong established the Lance Armstrong Foundation and the Livestrong brand to help people suffering with cancer. Since 1997, the foundation has raised close to half a billion dollars for people doing battle with the disease. Those close to Armstrong say he has always worked tirelessly for the foundation.
Villain (?)

Despite his ability to beat cancer and comeback to win the most grueling road race in the world, skeptics claimed that Armstrong must have taken performance-enhancing drugs — namely the blood booster EPO and anabolic steroids that mimic the male hormone testosterone — to be able to overcome so many obstacles. These allegations emerged after Armstrong’s first Tour win in 1999 and gained momentum as his victories and notoriety grew. Things really came to a head in 2011 when a US grand jury investigating drug use in sports summoned several of Armstrong’s teammates to court — including Tyler Hamilton, who claimed he saw Armstrong use EPO and testosterone. A short time after testifying, Hamilton appeared on the CBS news program 60 Minutes and outlined his relationship with Armstrong and reiterated the fact that his teammate used performance-enhancing drugs. Hamilton’s claim was supported by two other US cyclists, Frankie Endreu and George Hincapie, both of whom said they saw Armstrong use banned substances. Hamilton went on to describe a drug test in 2001 that indicated Armstrong had taken EPO after competing in the Tour de Suisse (a tune up race for the Tour de France). The positive test result seems to have been concealed. Journalists investigating the incident have speculated that two donations totaling $125,000 to cycling’s governing body (the Union Cycliste Internationale or UCI) may have played a role in quashing the test result. Armstrong says the donations were to help pay for drug testing equipment purchased by the UCI.

For his part, Lance Armstrong points to the fact that he has passed hundreds of drug tests (repeatedly referring to himself as “the most tested athlete ever”) as evidence that he is not a cheater. In terms of the failed drug test in 2001, he says that the sample must have been spiked at the lab. He claims that his detractors — the USADA in particular — have mounted a vendetta against him and that, after a lawsuit attempting to block the USADA’s doping charges was thrown out of court, he made the decision to stop fighting his accusers. In a media statement, Armstrong said, "There comes a point in every man’s life when he has to say, ‘Enough is enough.’ For me, that time is now." (lancearmstrong.com, August 23, 2012) The USADA responded by claiming that Armstrong’s choice to give up the fight was proof that he would not be able to defend the charges against him. Apparently they had blood samples from 2009 and 2010 that confirmed drug use and the testimony of at least 10 witnesses who had direct knowledge of Armstrong taking performance-enhancing drugs. They also had frozen urine samples from previous Tour de France races that, given new testing methods, would show Armstrong used EPO. By withdrawing from the USADA process, the evidence and testimony will never be revealed in an open and public forum.

Hero or Villain?

While Lance Armstrong may have started his speech to the World Cancer Congress in Montreal with a defiant message defending his cycling accomplishments, the rest of his speech spoke of his courageous battle with cancer and the tremendous accomplishments of his foundation in the global fight against the disease. Only the Terry Fox Foundation has raised more than the $500 million raised by Lance Armstrong and his Livestrong brand. Cheater or not, his efforts to help experts find a cure for cancer can’t go unnoticed. He may have given up the fight against charges of drug use commitment to fighting cancer. Perhaps this but he certainly has not relented in his makes him simultaneously a hero to those battling cancer and a villain to those claiming he tainted the sport of cycling by using performance-enhancing drugs.
To Consider

1. What evidence is there that Lance Armstrong is a hero?

2. a) What evidence is there that Lance Armstrong is a villain?
   b) How strong is the evidence against him?
   c) How does Armstrong respond to accusations that he used performance-enhancing drugs?

3. Based on your reading of the article, where do you stand on the issue? Is Lance Armstrong a hero or a villain?
VIDEO REVIEW

Pre-viewing Activity

Keep the following question in mind while you review the contents of the table:

Why might an athlete choose to take performance-enhancing drugs?

In the controversy surrounding Lance Armstrong, two performance-enhancing drugs have been repeatedly mentioned: erythropoietin and steroids.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Benefits for athletes</th>
<th>Side effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erythropoietin (EPO) — a peptide hormone released from the kidney. Erythropoietin helps boost the oxygen carrying capacity of blood by increasing a person’s red blood cell mass. This boost gives the person energy.</td>
<td>The higher the presence of red blood cells, the more oxygen is present in the blood stream. This leads to a significantly higher level of energy. EPO aids in endurance and muscle stimulation.</td>
<td>Thickening of the blood resulting in strain on the heart because it is harder to pump the thicker blood through the bloodstream. This can dramatically increase the likelihood of heart attack or stroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steroids — a synthetic form of the male sex hormone testosterone. Testosterone aids in the building and maintenance of muscle mass. Steroids allow for the building of muscle mass and increases muscular endurance.</td>
<td>An athlete can build muscle mass quickly with less time and pain between workouts. Steroids also improve strength and endurance.</td>
<td>High blood pressure, heart conditions, and liver damage are just a few of the many side effects of steroid abuse. There are also psychiatric problems — like increased aggression (‘roid rage’) — associated with steroid abuse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viewing Questions

1. a) Why did allegations of drug use by Lance Armstrong become more intense in 2010? Who levied the accusations against him?
b) What does the person making the allegations say happened at Armstrong’s house in 2003?

2. What is the name of Armstrong’s cancer charity?

3. Why do many people consider Lance Armstrong to be a source of inspiration?

4. How many cyclists did the United States Anti-Doping Agency say that they had lined up to testify against Armstrong?

5. a) What did Tyler Hamilton say he saw Armstrong do on more than one occasion?

b) What is the drug EPO designed to do?

6. a) How many drug tests has Armstrong passed?

b) What do anti-doping regulators think of these test results?

7. When the US Anti-Doping Agency declared him a cheat, how did Lance Armstrong respond?
8. What impact has the accusations of cheating had on the Livestrong brand?

9. How much money has Lance Armstrong and Livestrong raised for cancer research?

10. What did Lance Armstrong tell the crowd gathered at the World Cancer Congress in Montreal? What did this reveal about his state of mind as his detractors continued to accuse him of cheating?

Post-viewing Questions

1. How is the Lance Armstrong controversy a reflection of our “win at all costs” society?

   Consider one or both of the following perspectives when answering the question:

   **IF** Lance Armstrong used drugs, experts believe he would have improved his performance by as much as five per cent — which is more than enough to put an already elite athlete over the top in competition. What does this say about an athlete’s desire to win?

   **IF** Lance Armstrong did not use drugs, his enemies have gone to great lengths to knock this hero off his perch. What does this say about a society that likes to see its heroes fall?

2. Does the fact that the Lance Armstrong Foundation has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for cancer survivors allow him to maintain his hero status even if he took performance-enhancing drugs when he competed?
LEARNING ACTIVITY: Forming an Educated Opinion

Read the Setting the Stage section of this News in Review story and complete the “To Consider” questions. Based on your reading, write two (2) opinion paragraphs (7-10 sentences each): one will argue in favour of the United States Anti-Doping Agency’s (USADA) decision to strip Lance Armstrong of all titles and awards from 1998 until his retirement; and the other will argue against the decision. The USADA decision essentially labeled Armstrong as a drug-using cheater and stripped him of seven Tour de France titles and an Olympic bronze medal. After you finish your two opinion paragraphs, write a summary paragraph where you state the position that most reflects your beliefs.

Prior to writing your two opinion paragraphs, jot down some point-form notes in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points in favour of USADA decision</th>
<th>Points against the USADA decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paragraph 1 – In favour of the USADA decision

Paragraph 2 – Against the USADA decision

Your opinion regarding the USADA decision
Follow-up questions

1. How difficult was it for you to complete this activity?

2. What did you find challenging about writing a paragraph contrary to your actual opinion?

3. How important do you think it is to have an understanding of both sides of an argument when forming an educated opinion?
DEBEATE

Form a group of five (5) and prepare to debate the statement below. Two people will argue for the statement and two people will argue against the statement. The fifth group member will act as the moderator — keeping the debate on topic and moving the debate from one phase to the next.

Debate statement

That athletes should be permitted to take performance-enhancing drugs in order to achieve optimal results in competitive sports.

Research: Use the information in this News in Review guide to help you prepare your argument. (Important note: You don’t need to be an expert on performance-enhancing drugs and their effects to take part in this activity. The goal is to help you use your existing knowledge to argue a point.)

Debate format

Opening Statement – FOR / AGAINST – one minute each (total – 2 minutes). The opening statement should present three points that your side will use to argue your position.

Debate Point #1 – FOR – explain your first point with as much conviction as possible (2 minutes)
Rebuttal Point #1 – AGAINST – challenge the argument put forward (2 minutes)
Debate Point #2 – FOR (2 minutes)
Rebuttal Point #2 – AGAINST (2 minutes)
Debate Point #3 – FOR (2 minutes)
Rebuttal Point #3 – AGAINST (2 minutes)

Reverse the process for the AGAINST side, ie. Debate Point #1 – AGAINST (2 minutes); Rebuttal Point #1 – FOR (2 minutes), etc. This should take another 12 minutes to complete.

Closing Statements – FOR / AGAINST – 2 minutes each (total 4 minutes)

Total time: 30 minutes
Guiding questions:

- What are the potential health risks associated with permitting performance enhancing drug use by athletes?
- Is a “win at all costs” mentality detrimental to competition or is this merely a reflection of what is happening in sports anyway?

Follow up

This activity calls for several debates to be happening in groups throughout the class. After the debates have been completed, your teacher might choose to call on the moderators and debaters to summarize their debate experience in an informal class discussion.